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## Reflecting the real world?: How British TV portrayed developing countries in 2005

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#### How to cite:

Smith, Joe; Edge, Lucy and Morris, Vanessa (2006). Reflecting the real world?: How British TV portrayed developing countries in 2005. London, UK: International Broadcasting Trust.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

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Version: Version of Record

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

[http://www.vso.org.uk/news/pressreleases/reflecting\\_the\\_real\\_world.asp](http://www.vso.org.uk/news/pressreleases/reflecting_the_real_world.asp)

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sometimes we are not very good at portraying the developing world in its humanity as opposed to people at the receiving end of some awful catastrophe we've always been told that people don't want to watch development stories, so it's always a risk in terms of ratings the world is becoming more interconnected and seizing on those moments that illustrate that makes for great television we are in this together there is a need for us all the time to make sure that we are exposing ourselves to enough information from a wide ranging in our sources of information from the complicated issues minutes from death 20 years a beautiful woman i think there's so much in Africa is still a far off little and very few have much infrastructure within those countries to do informed reporting part of our job in public service broadcasting is to embrace risk and to say 'we'll support you when it goes wrong' i'm not sure we always live up to that the biggest problem we have is persuading the broadcasters to take financial and creative risks on a project that doesn't already exist there are so many things happening in the wider world that are on our doorstep or coming to our doorstep we've got civilization into the 21st century in reasonably good shape i don't know that we're going to get it out of the 21st century in anything like as good a shape where has all the money actually gone? when people see Africans on television it's usually when they are broken but most Africans don't live broken lives the world is becoming more interconnected and seizing on those moments that illustrate that makes for great television we're all pandering to an existing stereotype about the developing world, particularly Africa, which is why all these negative stories are considered newsworthy you felt that he could maybe relate to the situation better, and that the kids might actually listen to him it feels so much more powerful than just some English white bloke trying to engage with these kids i don't want to feel depressed after a long day at work, i just want to be entertained

## REFLECTING THE REAL WORLD?

HOW BRITISH TV PORTRAYED DEVELOPING COUNTRIES IN 2005

Joe Smith, Lucy Edge and Vanessa Morris

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# FOREWORD

The horror of 7 July 2005 is etched in all our memories; similarly, the Tsunami, the Pakistan earthquake or the wars and famines in Africa. But while we know that the London suicide bombings do not define the UK, we are prone to suppose that Asian and African disasters tell us all we know, and all we need to know, about the developing world. Even the Make Poverty History campaign and the Live 8 concerts, which enthused millions of people, inadvertently contrived to confirm a stereotype of Africa as a continent on its knees.

So, despite the fact that last year we saw more of the developing world on our TV screens than ever before, I doubt that we have a much deeper understanding of the people who live in Africa and Asia, and with whom we share this fragile planet. This is not to dismiss a significant number of programmes, spanning news and current affairs, entertainment and drama, that brought us a more diverse, rounded and even celebratory view of the developing world. But there is more, much more, to be done.

Specifically, broadcasters not only need to put the developing world far more emphatically and systematically on their agenda. They should also exercise far more imagination to ensure that people living in poor countries are not merely seen as victims of poverty. I do not expect, or wish, news and current affairs programmes to become ‘good news’ propaganda, but they could offer a wider and more balanced perspective. Similarly, documentary, drama, and entertainment producers should use their range of talents to embrace the people of the ‘poor’ world as well as the ‘rich’ world.

This report points the way ahead. Through audience research and interviews with leading broadcasters, programme makers, development specialists and, most important of all, viewers, it explores the impact of British television coverage of the developing world in 2005. It also offers a blueprint for programmes that engage, entertain, educate and, above all, provide British audiences with richer representations of the world beyond our everyday lives. I hope it will inspire those who have it within their power to make it happen.



A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jonathan Dimbleby".

**Jonathan Dimbleby**  
Broadcaster and VSO President



# ‘We are in this together’

female focus group respondent, Oldham

HOLBY CITY, BBC ONE

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report presents two new pieces of research that seek to tell the story of how television audiences and broadcasters experienced and responded to a year of disasters, debates and events in and about the developing world.

The work was inspired by observations from leading broadcasters who had acknowledged criticism of past performance, but felt quantitative measures of broadcasting did little to improve understanding of what kinds of programmes made an impact on audiences. Previous published analyses have focused on the amount of coverage devoted to international issues but did not tend to examine the diversity of tastes and expectations among the public.

The focus group research has pointed to two very different needs. There is a substantial body of people who are already engaged with developing world issues and want content that is richer and more authentic. At the other end of the scale is another group that resists broadcast material about the developing world unless they are drawn to it by familiar faces and formats. Both groups express a desire for programmes that are positive and transforming, contain human interest stories and tell them something they do not already know.

These findings mesh well with the material derived from the body of 23 interviews with leading broadcasters and developing world specialists. Broadcasters acknowledge past and current weaknesses. But all respondents feel that recent experiments have broken new ground with both engaged and disengaged audiences.

The relationship between broadcasters, audiences and media technologies is entering a period of flux.

Multi-channel, internet and on-demand viewing are transforming the broadcasting and viewing landscape. This moment presents both threats and opportunities in terms of advancing public understanding and debate of some of the most complex but vitally important issues facing the world.

Making the most of the opportunities and minimising the risks in the new broadcasting environment will require an act of commitment from broadcasters with regard to developing world issues. It will require them to keep questioning assumptions about what the audience will and won't watch, and to question existing categories. The clear distinction between 'domestic' and 'international' is melting. Faster, stronger flows of people and ideas are loosening definitions of citizenship and identity, and globalisation and environmental change issues point to an interdependent world.

For NGOs there are also lessons to be learned. Major collaborations such as Make Poverty History are effective ways of gaining public and media attention, but they also carry risks. Celebrity endorsement should be approached with care: audiences can respond with cynicism and messages can be distorted or lost.

Broadcasting showed some important examples of both leadership and creativity in 2005 in its representations of the developing world. Can it sustain this? This research suggests that if public service broadcasting is to mean anything in the fast-changing media environment, it needs to:

- make more space to understand and think about complex and unfamiliar issues and places

- be more open to pollination from outside influences
- invite risk taking and experiment
- look for creative ways of splicing together genres and platforms to reach a wide range of audiences.

Too much of a shopping list? Perhaps this can best be seen as a recipe for getting good programmes to wide audiences at a moment of uncertainty and change.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

#### TO BROADCASTERS:

- Ensure that developing world stories and issues feature across genres – not just news and current affairs, but also drama and entertainment – to reach a range of audiences. Invest in marketing and scheduling to deliver wider audiences and to deepen impact
- Challenge the assumption that developing world programming is very difficult to get through commissioning processes. Clear statements and strategies from leading commissioners, with indications of earmarked funds and slots, will unlock creative ideas
- Reward and protect risk taking: ring fence development funding for innovative work that takes representations of the developing world into new territory
- Sustain commitments to programme making beyond the UK, and nurture new work that explores common experiences from around the world. Consider international co-production partnerships with a more diverse range of players
- White British voices continue to dominate on both sides of the camera and in the commissioning process. Invest in a more

diverse pool of talent to deliver more representations of the developing world that people there will recognise

- The professional world of broadcasters and commissioners is very closed and there needs to be time for pollination from a wider range of influences. Invest more energy in getting to grips with complex issues, and raising the capacity of staff to tell stories about them. Brainstorms with international development agencies and policy specialists can help.

#### TO NGOS, ACADEMIA AND POLICY-MAKERS:

- Build trust with broadcasters and help them to tell stories about complex issues by being clear and authoritative sources of interpretation and analysis
- Become storytellers when engaging the media, not issue-sellers. Work harder to uncover and present human stories and personalities
- In assessing broadcaster performance in representing the developing world, recognise the impact that programmes have may count for much more than the number of programmes
- Invest resources in processes that allow richer links between broadcasters and specialists. For example, bursaries and fellowships and media training within the organisation, which are not simply focused on news and not only for frontline staff
- Work to understand the changing media landscape. Interactivity and on-demand media will help create communities of interest. There are increasing opportunities for collaboration between media and civil society institutions
- Look for opportunities to engage media beyond news and current affairs: drama and entertainment work differently on audiences, and can reach wider audiences.



‘TV can’t change the world but it can play a big part in informing us’  
male, London

WHAT VIEWERS THINK



In November 2001, *The Live Aid Legacy*, a research report commissioned by VSO, revealed that attitudes in the UK towards the developing world tend to be static and negative. The findings showed that people connect developing countries with conflict, disaster and starving people, who they feel are very different and distant from themselves.

This sense of people in the developing world appearing to be ‘different’ and neither related nor relevant to the UK public appeared to be linked to the stereotyped images of the developing world widely portrayed in the UK media.

Following on from this, a new qualitative research project was carried out to explore the impact of television programming in 2005 on UK attitudes to the developing world. The research placed particular emphasis on programmes about Africa.

The overall aim of this research was to learn how programming could better engage and inspire viewers in the future – and create a positive change in their ways of thinking about developing countries.

The methodology employed was six group discussions and four paired in-depth interviews. These were conducted in London, Birmingham and Oldham among:

- people with a negative or neutral disposition towards the developing world
- people with a positive disposition towards the developing world (including a group of returned VSO volunteers)
- second and third generation UK nationals from Black and Minority Ethnic communities.

KEY SAMPLE DIFFERENCES

There were some key differences between the positive and the more negative respondents, which proved to be fundamental in understanding their programming needs.

Those with a more positive attitude towards the developing world were well informed and more widely travelled than the more negative respondents. Their favourite types of programme often included news and documentaries, serious drama and wildlife programmes. They had a very human image of people in the developing world and clearly felt a sense of responsibility to help them.

Those who were more negative about developing world issues were quite comfortably absorbed in their own lives. Their favourite programmes were light escapism, such as soaps, comedies, sport and reality TV. This group of people had stronger feelings about charity beginning at home, and felt quite comfortable putting people from other countries out of their minds. They had developed

a number of finely tuned ‘get-out clauses’ that precluded any sense of responsibility for them. A common sentiment of this group was ‘it’s distressing but there’s nothing I can do’, and there was a strong feeling that their own lives were difficult enough in the UK without worrying about people from the developing world.

The second and third generation respondents were, perhaps surprisingly, closer in attitude to the more neutral/negative respondents than to the positive

ones. Many of them had severed all ties with their country of origin and didn’t feel a strong sense of responsibility to help people in the developing world. They felt that Britain was their home, and that tended to be where their loyalty – and charity – lay.

The striking difference between those with a positive attitude to the developing world and those with a neutral/negative view suggests that there are two different audiences for television about the rest of the world.

KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN POSITIVE AND NEUTRAL/NEGATIVE RESPONDENTS

Neutral/Negative	Positive
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Very absorbed in own lives</li><li>■ Believe they are right to be so</li><li>■ Feel there’s so much to do ‘at home’ – ‘there are children starving here, you know’</li><li>■ Believe they can’t help – ‘it’s distressing but there’s nothing I can do’</li><li>■ See their lives as stressful and difficult – they don’t need any more misery</li><li>■ Attuned to ‘get-out clauses’</li><li>■ Switch off</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Inform themselves</li><li>■ See people from the developing world as humans – ‘just like us’</li><li>■ Find much to admire in people from the developing world – dignity, hard work, respect for elders</li><li>■ See mutual benefits in a closer relationship</li><li>■ Want a personal connection</li><li>■ Take responsibility</li></ul>



**DEVELOPING WORLD: IMAGES AND ASSOCIATIONS**

The new research concluded that, four years on from *The Live Aid Legacy*, associations with the developing world are still static, one-dimensional images of desperation. Both positive and negative respondents associated the developing world with famine, poverty and disease. People's initial image was very often of starving babies with flies around their eyes.

There is a strong sense that developing world governments are corrupt. Both positive and negative respondents talked about gross economic mismanagement and money being spent on flash cars for government officials:

**‘Where has all the money actually gone?’**

**male, Birmingham**

Even natural disasters are blamed on government failure to provide the right detection equipment and housing that can withstand their force. Events like the G8 Summit have contributed to a sense that the problems in the developing world are largely political – and for politicians, not the public, to deal with. Media coverage of corruption has played a central role in further convincing negative respondents that people from developing countries are very different from them, and not people they feel connected to.

While both positive and negative respondents talked about corruption, their response to it was different. Positive respondents felt frustrated, but still felt a sense of duty to help developing countries, perhaps even more so if their governments are corrupt. For negative/neutral respondents, however, government corruption provided a strong and unashamed reason not to help: ‘it’s their own fault’.

There have been no signs of a positive shift in attitudes towards the developing world over the last year. Disasters such as the Asian Tsunami and the South Asian earthquake, and events like Live 8 may have brought people’s attention to the developing world, but they may have in fact reinforced (for negative respondents) the sense that the developing world is a hopeless cause.

Crucially, the media is felt to be largely responsible for people’s overwhelmingly negative image of the developing world. There was a very strong sentiment across the sample that these countries are portrayed in too negative a light. Instead, people expressed a desire to hear via the media the good news, the positive side of life in Africa, and any progress that is being made.

**REACTIONS TO TV COVERAGE IN 2005**

Television is definitely considered to be the most influential media source, although there was little top-of-mind awareness of specific programmes about the developing world. The only consistent mention across the research was news coverage of the Tsunami, and to a much lesser extent, the South Asian earthquake. The hand-held video images of the Tsunami and its devastating effects stuck in people’s minds. It was also a tragedy that everyone could relate to, as many people had either visited, or knew people who had visited, the affected areas.

Live 8 was not top of mind for programming on the developing world, and was not often raised spontaneously. The reason for this was that people saw it first and foremost as a music event. Negative respondents in particular didn’t know much about, or take an interest in, the political or campaigning angle. For most, it was seen as a big concert with celebrities that they enjoyed watching on a big screen – it was a highlight of their summer.

**‘Nothing has happened in the past year. Idi Amin was eating off gold plates and nothing has changed. If their government wasn’t so corrupt it wouldn’t have such devastating effects’**

**female, London**

The effect Live 8 has had on people’s attitudes does not appear to have been a positive one. For many, it has reinforced the fact that little or nothing has changed in the last 20 years, as the images of the event were similar to those in 1985. For neutral/negative respondents, at its most extreme, Live 8 was a worldwide public message communicating that, 20 years on, there is just no point in giving to, or caring for, the developing world.

Importantly, however, there was one strong image from Live 8 that gave a positive and much more hopeful image of the developing world. The appearance of Birhan Woldou – a survivor from the Ethiopian famine of 1984/5 – was uplifting and emotional for both positive and negative respondents. She provided a very personal and real image of Africa that people connected to. For negative respondents, this provided a glimpse of the developing world as human and worthwhile. This image is effective against their ‘get-out clauses’; they can see the effects of donations, and they can feel good about it.

**‘We saw that girl who was a few minutes from death 20 years ago, and here she was, 20 years later, a beautiful woman’**

**female, Oldham**

**‘I don’t normally like documentaries; they depress me. But that looked quite good, actually. It was interesting’**

**female, Birmingham on *African School***



**AFRICAN SCHOOL, BBC FOUR**

Other TV coverage that was mentioned spontaneously to researchers included:

- GMTV’s campaign to improve quality of life for school children in South Africa
- *Comic Relief*
- *Children in Need*
- *Holby City*
- The Concert for Bangladesh
- *Tribe*
- *Hotel Rwanda*
- *City of God*
- *Force Fed*
- general news coverage.

The most powerful and memorable programming managed to mix identification and empathy with challenge and transformation.

‘It’s nice to see the good bits of Africa, not just doom and gloom and sadness. It shows you the actual country and its beauty’  
female, Birmingham on *Geldof in Africa*

#### LEARNING FROM THE PROGRAMME CLIPS

Respondents were shown a short video containing TV clips from:

- *Geldof in Africa*, BBC ONE
- *Holby City*, BBC ONE
- *Living with AIDS*, Channel 4
- *Sex Traffic*, Channel 4
- *Battle for the Amazon*, BBC TWO
- *African School*, BBC FOUR.

The clips that had the most impact were those that challenged existing perceptions and encouraged people – particularly the negative respondents – to see the developing world in a different light. The presence of strong characters was important for building interest and connecting viewers with the programme and its content. Any element of light-heartedness and humour within the clips was particularly helpful in engaging the more negative respondents.

The programmes with the strongest appeal and impact were *Living with AIDS* and *African School*. Both showed elements of real life in the developing world in a clear and personal way. The content was new to the viewer, at times shocking and highly engaging. Despite covering gritty and serious material, both also showed a light or humorous side that helped to sustain viewers’ interest and attention.

In *Living with AIDS*, a documentary presented by Sorious Samora, the focus groups particularly liked the style of the presenter. Since he was of African origin himself, this made the content and his views feel more in touch with reality. Viewers also felt that the people in the programme would have communicated with him in a more natural way than with someone else.



LIVING WITH AIDS, CHANNEL 4

The head teacher in *African School*, a fly-on-the-wall documentary series, was also well liked. Her strong character made for compelling viewing, especially among female respondents.

*Geldof in Africa*, a documentary series presented by Bob Geldof, was also popular with some of the respondents because of the beautiful scenery. It opened people’s eyes to different, more positive pictures of Africa, and started moving their thoughts away from images of starving children. Negative respondents tended to respond to Bob Geldof as he is a familiar face, bringing the issues closer to them. There was some sense from them, however, that he also reminds people of the lack of progress, as his message hasn’t appeared to change in 20 years. Some of the more positive respondents saw Geldof’s ‘give us the f\*\*\*\*\* money’ approach as part of the problem.

‘They should make more along the lines of that, pretty hard-hitting but also as drama, it gets more viewers and raises awareness’

male, Birmingham on *Sex Traffic*

#### AN OVERVIEW

Lowest appeal/impact

Highest appeal/impact

*Battle for the Amazon* *Holby City* *Sex Traffic* *Geldof in Africa* *Living with AIDS* *African School*

The tone of *Sex Traffic*, a gritty drama about the illegal trafficking of women as prostitutes, was popular among the more positive respondents, who said they tended to watch programmes about this sort of issue. They particularly appreciated the fact that it was hard-hitting and shocking, yet still educational. The serious tone and subject matter made it feel true to life and believable. However, this style of programming was not so appealing to the more negative respondents, as they preferred more light-hearted television. They didn’t want to feel depressed by programmes, and some found the tone too heavy.

For the negative respondents, the special edition of *Holby City* that was set entirely in Africa was more to their liking. Many of them watched this kind of programme anyway, and they engaged much more with it. An *EastEnders*’ storyline about HIV & AIDS was mentioned by these viewers. They also said they would welcome this approach to programming about the developing world. The *Holby City* clip was generally appealing, although a few viewers felt that some of the acting was

disappointing, which detracted from it. Ideally, stories of this kind in the future would feature in the more popular soaps and involve familiar characters. The more positive respondents also tended to like this kind of programming as they watched these shows as well, and appreciated that they could reach and educate a wide audience.

The programme with the least appeal was the documentary *Battle for the Amazon*. Both positive and negative respondents felt this programme was entirely issue based with no characters they could relate to. For the negative respondents, there was nothing they could engage with, as they felt that the issues were not relevant to their lives. The focus group responses clearly showed that for this type of programme to appeal to a wide audience, it needs to demonstrate how issues relate directly to them and their lives.

‘It feels so much more powerful than just some English white bloke trying to engage with these kids’

female, London on *Living with AIDS*

‘It’s a good way of getting to people, because people do talk about this type of thing. Well I do anyway. I love *Holby City!*’  
female, London on *Holby City*

THE WAY FORWARD FOR PROGRAMMING:  
WHAT PEOPLE WANT

Respondents were clear about what they wanted from programmes about the developing world. Their ideals inevitably reflected their favourite genres, and there were therefore different suggestions from positive and negative respondents. The following elements, however, had wide appeal and were requested across the sample:

- A more balanced and honest view – no bias, show it as it is
- The positive sides of the developing world – a feel-good factor, uplifting rather than depressing
- Containing new news – more positive stories and ‘things I don’t already know’
- Characters and personalities to relate to – building a rapport over time
- Real-life issues, how people really live – enabling empathy, ‘they aren’t that different from us’
- Light-hearted tone (more for negative respondents)
- Hard-hitting tone (more for positive respondents).

PROGRAMME IDEAS

The focus groups came up with several new programme ideas that could encompass some or all of these elements, and thus have wide appeal:

Positive and transforming

- *Jamie’s African School Dinners*
- *Ethnic Cooking Made Easy*
- *African Grand Designs*
- *Extreme Makeover* meets *Africa’s Next Top Model*.

Impactive and informative

- *24* or *Spooks* in Africa
- Programmes made in Africa, by Africans
- The effects of global environmental issues on people in the UK
- The real story in seven programmes (for example, poverty, starvation, corruption, AIDS, nature, lifestyle, culture).

Up close and personal

- *Life Swap*
- *I’m A Celebrity Get Me Out of Here*
- On-the-job comparisons
- *Roots*
- *Little Britain in Africa*
- *Friends in Africa*
- *Backpackers Exposed*.

A FEW WORDS ABOUT MARKETING

As important as the content is the way that the programme is marketed. Judging from our focus groups, future programming may benefit from a different approach. For example, negative/neutral respondents were more likely to watch programmes that had titles and were marketed in the vernacular of more popular programmes. Programming could also be trailed more prominently and before or after shows that appeal to a mass audience.

Lucy Edge, Vanessa Morris

METHODOLOGY FOR FOCUS GROUPS

We commissioned consumer research agency, Rosenblatt, to run a number of focus groups to explore viewers’ reactions to television coverage of the developing world in 2005.

TEN SESSIONS IN HOME AMONG THE KEY AUDIENCES

- 6 x two-hour groups of six respondents each: 5 with long-term UK residents; 1 with returned VSO volunteers
- 4 x 90-minute in-depth interviews with pairs of second or third generation UK nationals.

SAMPLE – LONG-TERM UK RESIDENTS  
6 x two-hour groups of six respondents each

Interest in the developing world	Age and lifestage	Region
Positive	20–30, with children	Birmingham
Neutral/negative	20–30, no children	London
Positive	30–40, no children	Oldham
Neutral/negative	30–40, with children	Oldham
Positive – returned VSO volunteers	40–50, with/without children	London
Neutral/negative	40–50, with/without children	Birmingham

SAMPLE – BLACK AND MINORITY ETHNIC UK NATIONALS  
4 x 90-minute in-depth interviews with pairs of second or third generation UK nationals

Nationality	Age	Region	Lifestage
Semi-integrated African	20–30	London	Single, no children
Semi-integrated Indian	40–50	Birmingham	Younger children
Largely integrated Bangladeshi	20–30	London	Younger children
Largely integrated African	40–50	Oldham	Older children



**‘People tend to commission programmes about things that, at some level, consciously or unconsciously, they’re a bit familiar with, so we need to get them out of their offices and expose them to different ideas and different cultures’**

Brian Woods, independent producer

## WHAT BROADCASTERS AND EXPERTS THINK

The aftermath of the Tsunami, the Commission for Africa, G8, Live 8, Make Poverty History, climate change conferences, Hurricane Katrina, the South Asian earthquake... 2005 was an extraordinary year, and it was television, above all, that brought these events and debates to British people. Many lives were lost or turned upside down by disasters in distant places; there were political debates concerning the developing world that carried the highest stakes.

These were important stories but difficult to tell. Broadcasters responded with substantial news reporting, but also new approaches in other areas of television. Some risks were taken and experiments introduced. But did public service broadcasters respond adequately to the challenges presented? Was the policy community (NGOs, politicians, academia) effective in its communications?

### ABOUT THE RESEARCH

The findings in this report are based on 23 interviews that were conducted between mid-December 2005 and the end of January 2006. A mix of senior public service broadcasters (channel controllers, commissioners and news editors), independent producers and filmmakers,

and leading academic, policy and NGO figures were interviewed. The interviewees are listed on page 24.

This research arose out of the Real World seminars project that has brought together leading broadcasters and developing world specialists in a series of dialogues over the last two-and-a-half years. The seminars aim to inspire fuller and more creative representations of the developing world on primetime television.

### MORE BAD NEWS?

‘This year I have been filming on five continents... and I know the world I see out there is very poorly reflected on the screen. Television is overwhelmingly domestic; perhaps that’s what viewers want but there’s very little reflection of the outside world’ (Brian Woods, independent producer).

The charge sheet against British television appears in a battery of critiques spanning more than a decade. Criticism has centred on the perpetuation of crude and damaging clichés. It is argued that television has helped to build an image of the developing world as remote, dangerous, dependent and unchanging (*The Live Aid Legacy*, VSO, 2001). People watching news

stories about the developing world struggle to understand them, or to place them in the context of their own lives. Research suggests that the British public is concerned, but fatalistic and ill informed. As Onyekachi Wambu from the African Foundation for Development put it:

**‘when people see Africans on television, it’s usually when they are broken, but most Africans don’t live broken lives.’**

But where should the camera point? And how should stories be told? Should the UK broadcast media attempt to communicate the bulk of experience in the developing world – ‘normal life’ – or is it proper for it to focus on images of need and devastation? The disasters of the Tsunami and South Asian earthquake were on such a scale that the events and their immediate aftermath were guaranteed substantial coverage. But the ongoing need for shelter, education and food, and for water and energy security are much less compelling for the media. Complex explorations of how biodiversity loss, climate change or economic globalisation affects the developing world are even more of a communications challenge. Explanations and

solutions are multi-layered, open-ended, fluid and complex. These characteristics are very difficult to match with the demands of broadcasting to big audiences.

But NGOs accept that they themselves have helped to create over-simplified and stereotyped images and are faced with a legacy of their own making. Mark Goldring of VSO acknowledged the role that NGOs still play in helping the media construct stereotypes, suggesting that ‘we can’t raise money without them’. Onyekachi Wambu agreed and argued that ‘the two biggest shapers of perception [of Africa are] the NGOs and the BBC... but what this begins to do is to alienate young Africans or other people of African descent from their own continent’.

This point about unintended audience impacts was taken a step further by people from the developing world attending the Real World seminars. Broadcasters had not realised the extent to which the BBC’s domestic coverage of the developing world has an audience in the countries that are the subject of stories. VHS tapes funnelled via diasporas, and, increasingly, internet reports, have great weight; as one Haitian women’s development worker put it: ‘you are defining how we think about our country’.



# ‘We’ve always been told that people don’t want to watch development stories, so it’s always a risk in terms of ratings’

Moise Shewa, independent producer

Whatever the content, the sheer mass of programming about the developing world appears to have increased in 2005, reversing a consistent trend of decline (charted by Dover and Barnett, *The World on the Box*, 3WE, 2004). The news and current affairs media were given plenty of chances in 2005 to answer their critics. A steady flow of disasters and major political events made certain that the developing world would command attention. There were also specific initiatives that worked more purposefully to experiment with new ways of bringing the developing world onto TV screens – above all, the BBC’s *Africa Lives* season. The question is whether the nature of those portrayals has moved on.

Some of the most prominent international political discourses of 2005 presented broadcasters with a body of very complex issues to explain to viewers. But Moise Shewa, an independent producer, notes that even in a year when there was substantial coverage of the developing world, there was reluctance to engage with ‘agendas for change’ in the way that broadcasters will engage with domestic issues. Others recognise the tight spaces within which news and current affairs production work, but feel that broadcasters keep taking the easy routes on difficult questions. The lack of familiarity with some of the underlying issues, especially among non-specialists at every level of production from researcher to director, was identified as an obstacle.

Channel 4’s Dorothy Byrne felt that news production was in some quarters responding to such critiques. She was not the only broadcaster to note that more commitment to tracking stories over time is needed, as is giving more rounded and humane accounts. But she also saw some specific weaknesses among all broadcasters:

**‘on our coverage of economic and scientific issues in the developing world we really have to raise our game – we have to stop shying away from the complicated issues’.**

Several respondents questioned whether broadcasters had sufficient capacity to cope. Explaining issues of aid, trade and debt, or climate change, demands a high degree of knowledge and judgement, and the broadcast media were felt to be lacking. Mike Green of DFID suggested that:

**‘the fundamental constraint is still that so much in Africa is a far-off place of which broadcasters know little, and very few broadcasters have got much of an infrastructure within those countries to do informed reporting’.**

Tom Burke, an environmentalist, made a parallel point about climate change: ‘these [are] fantastically complex issues and television isn’t good at the complex... The TV channels are not intellectually equipped to deal with, to put the sort of love, of effort, and planning, into dealing with the complexity of these issues, because they simply don’t devote the resources to it’. Criticisms of capacity were not solely levelled at broadcasters. Both Tom Burke and, on the development NGO side, Mark Goldring, also charged the NGOs with failing to deliver in terms of an approachable language and body of material that the media could work with. There are other more independent sources of advice and ideas, including academia, but Mike Hulme, head of a climate change research institute that has done a lot of media work, explained that specialists were reluctant to advise or contribute when the media showed so little understanding of the nature of academic debate.

Several respondents were critical of the NGOs’ shortsighted and sometimes ill-considered deployment of celebrity endorsements that often took the place of more considered communications. Steve Tibbett of the Make Poverty History coalition built on this point. He noted the increasingly short- and medium-term focus of the NGO community, built on corporate-style annual targets. He suggested that this had narrowed their vision. One consequence of this is that they may have less capacity to inspire or provoke richer thinking among themselves, their supporters or the media.



MOISE SHEWA



CHRISTOPHER HIRD

## THE VIEW FROM INSIDE A BUBBLE

Both insiders and outsiders talked about how broadcast decision-makers work in a media bubble. In professional terms they live in ‘gated communities’. Intense time pressures, and the importance of networking within organisations and across the industry, can leave most media professionals – particularly the relatively small numbers of commissioning gate keepers – with few opportunities to engage with new issues and fresh (non-media) voices.

Media decision-making culture is largely implicit and difficult to track: ‘a lot of things happen through conversations’ (Lorraine Heggessey, former Controller of BBC ONE). Much depends on the perceived views of channel controllers and commissioning executives. There is a handful of media professionals that set the unstated parameters of what might amount to viable programme proposals. The pressures on these executives to deliver audience share has always been there, but has intensified in a multi-channel world: ‘To put it brutally, for a commercial broadcaster like Channel 4, if you’re not increasing your market share these days you’re going backwards... You’re in a declining market’ (Peter Dale, Head of More4).

Channel controllers, working with schedulers and marketing and audience researchers, get to know their (ever more tightly defined) audiences well: ‘they just want to consolidate that audience and make sure they get the bums on seats, because every channel controller knows that if they don’t, if audience share goes down during their tenure, then they are going to find it hard to get another job’ (Brian Woods). Leading independent producers hold a more subtle, but still substantial, influence: channel executives trust their (commercial) instincts.

# ‘The biggest problem we have is persuading the broadcasters to take financial and creative risks on a project that doesn’t already exist’

Christopher Hird, independent producer



**‘In the day-to-day noise of commissioning and budgets it’s very difficult to stand back and say “over the next five years what should we be trying to do?” So I would welcome that kind of strategic approach. But in the end, it’s about the producer that walks through the door and says “I’ve got a burning desire to do this”’**

**Peter Dale, Head of More4**

It is taken as given within broadcasting that programmes about the developing world will rate poorly beyond a small and committed audience (identified particularly with Channel 4, BBC TWO, BBC FOUR and More4). Hence such programmes ‘are very hard to get commissioned because broadcasters don’t think they’re going to rate, and they can be a bit disappointing to make because you’ve put a lot of effort into them and people don’t watch them in large numbers’ (Stephen Lambert, RDF Media). Another independent, Christopher Hird, goes further in explaining commissioners’ ‘safety first’-based resistance to developing world programming. He believes they are averse to taking risks with audiences, fear critical comment from peers and are so insulated by their professional circumstances that they are, to a large degree, ignorant of the true state of the world.

Talking of current affairs programming, Peter Horrocks, until recently Head of Current Affairs at the BBC, spoke of the ‘paradox that people are better travelled and better educated than they have ever been and they’re subject to more international influences, but in their media consumption they’re probably more parochial’. Peter Dale confirmed that ‘it’s a given among commissioning editors that films about developing countries are not going to

drive the [audience] share like a domestic documentary is going to’.

This corroborated one NGO media worker and former TV producer’s own experience: ‘every time I had a programme about Africa commissioned, we didn’t get an audience. Yes, it’s absolutely true’ (Onyekachi Wambu). Peter Horrocks believes that the public service broadcaster’s responsibility to inform domestically oriented mainstream audiences about the world beyond can only be achieved ‘by stealth’ with clever programming, where impact rather than quantity is the yardstick.

But several interviewees argued that these assumptions about what audiences want are inadequately tested, and can be proven wrong. Brian Woods recalled how his *Orphans of Nkandla* film had received no trails and went out in a late night slot, but got 650,000 viewers, and feedback suggested that it made a very deep impact on many of them. Independent producers were critical of the view that mainstream audiences would only stay with developing world stories if they were led by big name domestic presenters: ‘this rating thing has become a real problem, especially when it comes to development stories. Take the BBC *Africa Lives* season, they gave Bob Geldof... three hours’ primetime television. What did he do with it?

He went back to regurgitate the same old kind of images that we had seen before’ (Moise Shewa, independent producer).

Broadcasters respond that familiar faces are deployed on the main terrestrial channels because they can bring a good audience to a programme, whatever the subject. Indeed, broadcasters involved in *Comic Relief* and the *Africa Lives on the BBC* season believe that audience share in primetime slots can rely on their presence.

However, there was widespread acknowledgement that broadcasters needed to improve the diversity of presenters. African reporters like Sorious Samora can bring a different tone and more challenging content.

This debate points to a larger issue about the role of public service broadcasting and its relationship with audiences. All interviewees were asked about whether audiences were viewed more as consumers or citizens. Non-broadcasters and some of the independent producers suggested that intensifying competition for audience share has seen a shift in emphasis, with broadcasters moving from serving citizens towards winning consumers. They suggest the long-standing public service broadcasting commitment both to entertain and inform is being eroded in favour of the former. This was explained in terms of the increasing levels of competition, not just among terrestrial broadcasters, but also between broadcasting and other media (web, home cinema, games).

Certainly, the multi-channel environment has seen a sharpened focus on attempting to understand better audience tastes and motivations. It is felt that this has resulted in more conservative programming on the main terrestrial channels. But one independent producer represented the view of most broadcasters on this question in viewing the distinction as unhelpful and simplistic:

‘Are viewers citizens or consumers? Well, they’re both and that varies according to how they’re feeling and how late it is and what’s happening in the world at that moment – and they expect television to be able to satisfy both’ (Stephen Lambert).

There are signs that at least some sections of the audience are looking for more diverse programming, and there is also evidence that broadcasters are thinking in more sophisticated ways about who their audiences are. For one thing, ‘the cultural ethnic and geographical roots are 50 times more diverse than the BBC’s original audience of 70 or 80 years ago, and therefore there is an awareness, an openness to the interconnectedness of global cultures in a way that hasn’t been so in previous generations’ (Roly Keating, Controller, BBC TWO). Chris Shaw (Five TV) cited the recent success of BBC TWO’s *Tribe* series as evidence that ‘there’s an appetite for collecting experience and that could include collecting experiences in the developing world’. Dorothy Byrne of Channel 4 sees the fast-changing expectations of audiences as demanding but very stimulating for programme makers. But did broadcasters rise to this challenge in 2005?



PETER DALE



ROLY KEATING

**‘British audiences love to see their own culture and life reflected but we were struck by how Bruce Parry’s series, *Tribe*, reached a surprisingly large audience with a younger focus than BBC TWO is often used to’**

**Roly Keating, Controller, BBC TWO**

## ISING TO THE CHALLENGE?

‘I don’t think the developing world will let us forget them any more’ (Dorothy Byrne).

One of the most widely discussed cases in the interviews was the BBC’s *Africa Lives* season. A central goal of the season was to help coverage of Africa break out of stereotypical images, and out of established niches in news and current affairs. The critical response from across the range of respondents was positive. Stephen Lambert, of leading independent production company, RDF, suggested that: ‘the Africa season on the BBC was a big statement of commitment – to put it right at the heart of the BBC ONE schedule... [it] was celebratory and yet at the same time tried to explain to people some of the realities of life in Africa today. It was very admirable and very bold of the BBC to do it’.

However, there was also criticism. Channel 4’s Dorothy Byrne felt that ‘by doing a lot on Africa at one moment, a broadcaster can divert attention from disappointing coverage of the rest of the world the rest of the time’.

Other respondents were particularly struck by the season’s commitment to carrying audiences that are seen by TV executives as resistant to developing world settings and stories into the heart of the season. BBC ONE brands and stars known to carry big audiences were deployed in this way – *Rolf on African Art* and *Strictly African Dancing* being prominent examples. Respondents saw drama, popular entertainment and children’s television (linked to interactive projects including

the twinning of schools) as having shown their potential to bring a fuller, more complex and realistic picture of the developing world to British audiences.

But it was felt that this wouldn’t happen without clear signals that invite risk taking and experiment. The *Africa Lives* season demonstrated that one of the simplest ways of doing this is to ring fence funds and good broadcast slots for developing world coverage. And this coverage was not primarily about news and current affairs. Lorraine Heggessey, who was instrumental in commissioning the season felt that:

**‘the challenge for me when I set it up was, rather than it being in the margins of the schedule, to make it absolutely in the centre of the mainstream. Richard Curtis did the drama, *Girl in the Café* about the G8 Summit, and because it was Richard over five million people watched it.’**

One of the consequences of the season is that it has gone some way to legitimising coverage of Africa. Producers/creatives already appear to feel more confident in approaching broadcasters with proposals set in or about the developing world. This may be building on a wider trend. Channel and commissioning executives pointed to other examples of this having succeeded in the recent past.

**‘We should look harder for positive stories. We’re all pandering to an existing stereotype about the developing world, particularly Africa, which is why all these negative stories are considered newsworthy’**

Chris Shaw, Five TV

**‘In the last year we have seen a much more holistic picture of the developing world, in particular Africa, on our TV screens’**

Mark Goldring, VSO

Channel 4’s *Unreported World* is expanding in 2006. The BBC’s *This World* and *Holidays in the Danger Zone*, have attracted critical acclaim for managing to lure and surprise audiences with fresh approaches to storytelling from around the world.

The *Africa Lives* season included some risk taking. Several respondents picked out the special edition of *Holby City* that was set in Ghana for praise in taking a primetime soap audience to a developing world setting. Seetha Kumar, Executive Editor of *Africa Lives* on the BBC said:

**‘it was the bravest, the most scary one to do, because *Holby* is a very successful brand – you have a brand that works incredibly well, the audience love it, and cherish its familiarity. So you take something like that and suddenly transform it into a completely alien territory – it could work brilliantly or fail very badly. You could end up losing viewers’ loyalty and damaging the brand.’**

But Christopher Hird of Fulcrum suggests that this kind of risk taking can help to refresh a strand. Indeed, two of the people involved in developing the *Africa Lives* season noted some substantial but unanticipated professional benefits of the season for the BBC. The cross-BBC working, and the experiences of people working in unfamiliar places, with new themes and in partnership with others, had been challenging but refreshing for those involved.

Respondents from outside broadcasting insisted that it was a mistake to assume that NGOs and specialists were asking for special treatment for the developing world. It was repeatedly argued that broadcasters were simply not reflecting the way the world is. This was accepted by Richard Bradley, an independent producer, who suggested that:

**‘so many things are happening in the wider world that are on our doorstep or coming to our doorstep – it’s going to be very hard for broadcasters to go back into one of those very domestic blinkered periods which we are just coming out of.’**



CHRIS SHAW



MARK GOLDRING



# ‘Sometimes we are not very good at portraying the developing world in its humanity, as opposed to people at the receiving end of some awful catastrophe’

Sian Kevill, BBC World

A recurrent theme was that the firm boundaries between ‘domestic’ and ‘international’ programming need to be softened in a world that is, in economic, cultural and environmental terms, increasingly interconnected. There are broadcasters that see this as an opportunity. The BBC’s Director of Television, Jana Bennett, suggests that:

**‘the world is becoming more interconnected and seizing on those moments that illustrate that, I think, makes for great television.’**

In the last couple of years, programme makers have had successes with films that have worked to demonstrate connections and commonalities between the developing world and UK audiences. Brian Woods’ films about slavery and AIDS showed the potential for this approach: ‘people did respond strongly to the fact that the chocolate they ate that day may have been produced by slaves’. Referring to *Orphans of Nkandla*, he suggested that despite the fact that it was about an AIDS epidemic in a distant country ‘the characters were talking about family problems and relationships, and husbands who didn’t listen to them, and children who wouldn’t talk to them about their problems... Yes it was about AIDS, but it was also about the kinds of problems that people have here too’.

This reflects a wider trend in current affairs broadcasting that has made space for films that can ‘create moments of empathy’ (Sian Kevill, BBC World). The new forms of storytelling are exhibited in BBC TWO’s *This World* strand, which has delivered a series of ambitious programmes that have demonstrated that difficult and demanding, often distant, issues can be made engaging through human stories. *One Day of War* and *Living Positive* raised awareness of ‘forgotten’ wars and people’s experiences of being HIV

positive. *Coming of Age* and *World Weddings* were praised as managing to ‘bring the world to the UK’ through rich storytelling based around emotionally charged experiences that are common to all of us. *This World* was built on audience research about what people would watch, but also on a desire to press for more authenticity in storytelling. However, despite the increased number of broadcasting slots that can carry new work in such areas, Lorraine Heggeseey warns that resources for all broadcasting will be spread thinner: ‘it will be more competitive, so there will be even more choice ... [but] it will be harder to get a “hit” and there’s less money.’

Technological developments are also playing a role. It was suggested that they are changing news and current affairs production more rapidly than any time in its history. A faster news cycle and cheaper communications technology is expanding the reach of these kinds of programming in a number of ways. Within a multi-platform broadcaster such as the BBC, it was felt that changing communications technologies are improving the flow of knowledge and story ideas within the institution, let alone their significance for audiences. Several respondents noted the potential of the World Service’s networks for enriching domestic outputs.

Both Nick Pollard of Sky News and Peter Horrocks of BBC News noted how technology is also making it cheaper and easier to return to stories. They felt there were several cases in the last year where they had answered the longstanding criticism of news and current affairs TV that it is constantly moving on to the latest bad news. Broadcasters suggested that they had, in the context of ‘return’ stories relating to the Tsunami and South Asian earthquakes, begun to get more involved in exploring problem solving. This was partly in response to feedback from audiences that they are frustrated and disempowered by a constant flow of bad news stories.

That there is greater interactivity with audiences is so evident as to be banal. But this fact has particular significance in discussion of representations of the developing world. Roly Keating saw audience–broadcaster interaction as integral to the decision-making environment: ‘We are now working with a richer and more complex dashboard of measures and feedbacks from the audience... We’ve got more soft data alongside the hard data’.

Technological developments are changing the audience experience: Jana Bennett, for example, suggested that broadband-TV convergence allows broadcasters to ‘create deeper value for audiences’. Without denying the challenges of the new environment, she sees opportunities to carry big audiences to important but difficult or unfamiliar issues: ‘our challenge is also to embrace big audiences and that is a challenge because of the way fragmentation also works. You have to be really creative, which is why something like *Africa Lives* had a mix of entertainment and culture in it, drama and events. We think [these] helped to connect more individuals to that part of the world’.

Lorraine Heggeseey explained that it wasn’t intended that ‘anybody would watch everything, but that everybody might watch something, and through that just get a slightly different perspective and draw back and think “there’s this whole vibrant culture and continent out there and they have success stories”’. The route to bringing the audience to difficult subjects might include celebrity appearances, good storytelling or recognition of a familiar writer, actor or book. But she emphasises that ‘it’s not only the developing world that it’s difficult to get across’.

Christopher Hird noted that almost half of the viewers of the South African drama *Red Dust* had never heard of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. While he had heard BBC people suggest that this showed the programme extended people’s understanding, he turned the point round to suggest that ‘I think that if I’d been at the BBC, I would say that this tells me we have a lot of work to do here!’

There was also self-criticism. The BBC’s Krishan Arora felt that, with the benefit of hindsight, they might have had less material in the season, and marketed some things more vigorously: ‘the main lesson is that you shouldn’t overdo it. Some programmes that felt quite big when they were being made didn’t [get audiences and] didn’t get marketed at all’. Steve Tibbett offered an NGO perspective on the season. While he welcomed the freshness of it, and the stereotype breaking, he summarised the feelings of several respondents: ‘my fear is that it’s seen as a “tick that box, done it, move on” approach’.



SIAN KEVILL



KRISHAN ARORA

## ‘Part of our job in public service broadcasting is to embrace risk and to say “we’ll support you when it goes wrong”. I’m not sure we always live up to that’

Krishan Arora, BBC

## A CHANGING MEDIA LANDSCAPE

The convergence of television and the internet opens up the flow of communication between broadcasters and audiences, and ‘the digital world allows you to spread your agenda across different platforms’ (Peter Dale).

But it also starts to erode the geographical boundaries around definitions of audience. Channel 4’s Dorothy Byrne: ‘The fact is, in ten years’ time, if we make programmes about the developing world, they will all be able to see them as they go out, simultaneously. People will just sit in Zimbabwe and watch it, and they’ll be able to say to themselves, “well that’s really patronising”, so they’ll immediately send me their visual e-mail condemning me, which will be broadcast round the world’.

But British broadcasting’s efforts to offer more complete accounts of the developing world will face substantial challenges before 2016. The UK’s multi-channel environment is maturing. It is generating a wider range of material, but also seeing resources (and audiences) spread more thinly. All of this is happening at a time when audiences are increasingly taking control of their viewing through ‘on-demand’ technologies. This combination brings threats and opportunities. Peter Horrocks fears that:

**‘for “worthy” programming of any description it’s a very difficult and bleak outlook. There is no doubt that the tough things in television will get significantly tougher and we will have to be even more creative and imaginative about how we try and get those to people, because they’ll just be gorging on great, amusing and enjoyable content that they love to watch – and why should they watch this stuff that we think they ought to?’**

His colleagues at the BBC, Roly Keating and Jana Bennett, see the glass as half full: multi-channel and on-demand will open up opportunities to give audiences richer experiences, more control and access to a wider range of voices. But they, and independent producers, also recognised that much hangs on decisions about marketing. Roly Keating noted how one of the successes of the *Africa Lives* season was that large audiences that watched popular entertainment on BBC ONE were made aware of material on BBC FOUR (for example *African School*) that would simply not have got an airing in crowded schedules across two channels.

But some commentators pointed out in asides that public service broadcasters may see their claim to be working for all communities in Britain eroded if they don’t succeed in finding dedicated space for the concerns and narratives of specific communities. The low entry costs and markets for niche media, via the web or radio, are resulting in vibrant alternatives to the established broadcasters.

Whatever the potential and risks of the fast-changing broadcasting environment, it was widely acknowledged that television needed to make more space for fresh thinking, and to open itself up to wider influences. Media professionals frequently confessed their isolation. They recognised the importance of being open to a wider range of influences – and the time and work-culture pressures that get in the way of this. Stephen Lambert insisted that:

**‘there is a need for us all the time to make sure that we are exposing ourselves to enough influences to be wide ranging in our sources of inspiration’.**

This isn’t about specific programme development but points to a need much further upstream in the creative process.

Talking of the benefits of the Real World seminars, Roly Keating suggested that ‘they work brilliantly as a place to encounter people from around the world with interesting experiences and academics who you would never get to encounter. As a broadcaster, you end up metabolising that kind of input in a rather unpredictable way’. One of the goals of the seminars has been to demonstrate interconnections between Britain and the developing world, and to question the boundary between ‘domestic’ and ‘international’ programming categories. Keating suggests this has been successful: ‘you begin to detach what was mainly, 10 or 15 years ago, described as the developing world from being a little separate category.’ Similarly, Jana Bennett, stressing that these partnerships were not about creating ‘an invitation to lobby’ but about giving valuable exposure to new stimuli, believes they ‘spark ideas and ideas are what, in the end, make good television. Knowledge is crucial – and if you don’t know much you reach for what’s most familiar.’

**‘We’ve got civilisation into the 21<sup>st</sup> century in reasonably good shape. I don’t know that we’re going to get it out of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in anything like as good a shape – and if there is a point to public service broadcasting, it’s about addressing that challenge’**

Tom Burke, environmentalist



TOM BURKE

## CONCLUSION: KEEP POLISHING THE MIRROR

The years ahead are going to present a series of challenges – economic, cultural, environmental – that can only be adequately addressed in democracies that have an informed and engaged citizenship. The developing world is at the sharp end of these challenges, and choices made by, and in, Britain and other leading developed countries will have a big effect on outcomes.

But there is plentiful evidence – most recently supported by the focus group research published as part of this report – that substantial sections of British television audiences have very limited understanding of, or feel connections to, the developing world. If public service television is one of the most powerful shapers of knowledge and feelings about distant places and people, then it is continuing to fail to serve its audiences.

Public service broadcasters have been tasked with holding up a clean mirror to the world. But they have to keep in view the fact that their audiences must be seen as a strange hybrid of citizen and consumer – there to be both informed and entertained. There are things they want to enjoy and things they need to know. The early decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will generate communications media that are as exhilarating as the early years of radio and television, with rich potential for choice, exploration and control by audiences. But the on-demand, multi-channel environment will make it easier for many people to stop at simply being entertained.

Two solutions have come through clearly: leadership and creativity. Broadcasters acknowledge the importance of leadership by both institutions and individuals:



‘One of the things you hope for is that the broadcasters will continue to have enough clout to lead these things because they need to. One of the reasons 2005 was so successful [in terms of developing world TV coverage] was that the BBC really did start to say, “look we’re really going to commit to this”’(Richard Bradley, independent producer).

Richard Bradley’s comment is, of course, also acknowledging the possibility that the power of broadcasters to ‘channel’ audiences to particular material may be severely eroded. But most of the broadcasters felt that their best response to this threat demands exactly the qualities – imagination, a willingness to take risks and engage in self-reinvention – that richer representations of the developing world require.

2005 was a year that questioned some assumptions about media performance in representing the developing world: news producers returned to disaster stories to track progress, and some very complex issues – including poverty and debt, and climate change – were tackled in popular news bulletins. Major primetime slots were given over to diverse, more rounded and often celebratory coverage of developing world contexts.

Broadcasting showed some important examples of both leadership and creativity in 2005 in its representations of the developing world. Can it sustain this? This research suggests that if public service broadcasting is to mean anything in the fast-changing media environment, it needs to:

- make more space to understand and think about complex and unfamiliar issues and places
- be more open to pollination from outside influences
- invite risk taking and experiment
- look for creative ways of splicing together genres and platforms to reach a range of audiences.

Too much of a shopping list? Perhaps this can best be seen as a recipe for getting good programmes to wide audiences at a moment of uncertainty and change.

Joe Smith

## LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

### BBC

- Jana Bennett, Director of Television
- Roly Keating, Controller, BBC TWO
- Peter Horrocks, Head of Television News
- Seetha Kumar, Executive Editor, *Africa Lives on the BBC*
- Sian Kevill, Editorial Director, BBC World
- Krishan Arora, Independents Executive

### OTHER BROADCASTERS

- Dorothy Byrne, Head of News and Current Affairs, Channel 4
- Peter Dale, Head of More4
- Chris Shaw, Senior Programme Controller, News and Current Affairs, Five TV
- Nick Pollard, Head of Sky News

### INDEPENDENT PRODUCERS

- Brian Woods, True Vision
- Stephen Lambert, RDF
- Christopher Hird, Fulcrum
- Richard Bradley, Lion
- Moise Shewa, Spiritworld
- Huma Beg, Serendip
- Lorraine Heggeseey, Talkback Thames

### POLICY EXPERTS

- Mark Goldring, Chief Executive, VSO
- Steve Tibbett, Head of Policy, ActionAid and Make Poverty History coordination team
- Onyekachi Wambu, African Foundation for Development (AFFORD)
- Tom Burke, E3G, Third Generation Environmentalism
- Mike Hulme, Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research
- Mike Green, Head of Civil Society and Information Department, DFID

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was funded by the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association, the Department for International Development, the International Broadcasting Trust, the Open University Geography Department and VSO.

The project team was Neera Dhingra (VSO), Mark Galloway (IBT), Joe Smith (OU), Laura Solomon (VSO) and Sally-Ann Wilson (CBA).

Thanks to Lucy Edge, Vanessa Morris and Jon Cohen at Rosenblatt for the focus group research, Anita Neville for planning and conducting the broadcaster interviews, Irene Oswick for transcribing them, Rachel Bishop for proofreading and to birdy for the design.

Photos courtesy of BBC, Channel 4, Five TV, BSkyB, Tightrope Pictures, VSO, John Maguire/Bob Geldof and individual interviewees.

**PUBLISHED BY**

**COMMONWEALTH BROADCASTING ASSOCIATION**  
17 Fleet Street  
London  
EC4Y 1AA  
[www.cba.org.uk](http://www.cba.org.uk)

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London  
SW15 2PN  
[www.vso.org.uk](http://www.vso.org.uk)

**£5.00**

**ISBN 0-9525050-6-1**

Printed on Revive paper; guaranteed minimum 80% de-inked post consumer waste by Park Lane Press, an environmental printer certified ISO14001